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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000638

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KBTS](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: IEDS KILL ONE, WOUND SEVERAL; TENSIONS
RISE

REF: A. 09 TBILISI 096

[¶](#)B. 08 TBILISI 2176

[¶](#)C. 09 TBILISI 484

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶](#)1. (C) Summary. On March 29, two roadside IEDs killed one and wounded six Georgian police officers outside the village of Dvani, in undisputed Georgian territory just outside the South Ossetian administrative boundary. This was the first fatal incident along the South Ossetian and Abkhaz administrative lines since the January 16 sniper attack in Knolevi (ref A) and follows several weeks without serious incidents. Even during this period, however, tension has remained high along the boundary, with local villagers subjected to the sound of regular shooting and explosions, especially at night. Even before March 29, military movements north of both boundaries were raising concerns. The planned April 9 protests have also caused worry, as locals fear police forces will be drawn away from the boundaries to cover the protests, and malicious forces will move into the vacuum. The Georgian government is concerned that this might be the first in a series of new provocations and has sought the international community's assistance in pushing for the establishment of the incident response mechanism agreed to in Geneva. End summary.

IED INCIDENT

[¶](#)2. (SBU) The following account is based primarily on the OSCE's findings. On March 29 at about 0845 on a secondary road near Dvani (southwest of Tskhinvali, in undisputed Georgian territory outside South Ossetia) leading from the main road to a Georgian checkpoint, a MON-50 (Claymore-type) anti-personnel mine exploded as a Georgian Internal Affairs Ministry pickup drove past. Five people were wounded, including one who later died in the hospital. Several minutes later, a second vehicle arrived safely to provide assistance. Fifteen to twenty minutes after the explosion, a Hyundai SUV carrying the local chief of police arrived, at which time a second IED detonated, wounding the chief of police and one other passenger. The Internal Affairs Ministry determined the first device was triggered by a tripwire; thus any car going past could have triggered it. The Internal Affairs Ministry and the OSCE determined the second device was triggered by remote control; the Internal Affairs Ministry, the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and the OSCE all determined it was targeted at those who responded to the initial blast. At a briefing for the diplomatic community, Shota Utiashvili, Internal Affairs Ministry spokesman also announced that two other unexploded devices were found at the site: a booby-trapped grenade and a jumping mine, which could have served either as the initial attack, or either a car or a pedestrian, or the secondary attack on the respondents.

¶3. (C) Dvani is across the administrative boundary from Muguti, where South Ossetian de facto authorities alleged Georgian forces mounted mortar and gun attacks on March 24 and 25-26. Georgian police officers and local villagers in the Dvani area confirmed to the OSCE that they heard firing and explosions on the Ossetian side at the times of the alleged attacks, but could not confirm any attacks being launched from the Georgian side, and the OSCE could not access the Ossetian side to assess the situation. On March 27, however, a South Ossetian contact told the OSCE that the Q27, however, a South Ossetian contact told the OSCE that the allegations were "propaganda" on the part of the de facto authorities. One OSCE monitor therefore downplayed the likelihood that the March 29 incident was a response to the alleged Georgian attacks, although he could not rule it out. The March 29 incident occurred very close to the location of a November 10, 2008 IED incident, which killed two Georgian police officers and wounded three (ref B).

GENERAL TENSION

¶4. (SBU) Although this incident marks the first fatality along the South Ossetian and Abkhaz boundaries since January 16, the situation has remained tense in both areas. Villagers report hearing firing, especially at night, on a regular basis, and sometimes explosions as well. In many cases, the sounds are never fully explained. In other cases monitors have been able to identify the source of the sound and determine it did not have an overtly malicious intent -- but the impact on the villagers is the same. On March 26, for example, OSCE monitors in Dvani received reports from

TBILISI 00000638 002 OF 002

local police of "intermittent, intense assault rifle fire and machine gun fire" from Muguti -- this was the same day the South Ossetians alleged a Georgian attack. Other police downplayed the sounds, however, calling them "not more intense than usual." Also on March 26, OSCE monitors received reports in Odzisi of "several explosions" from across the administrative boundary, which Russian and Ossetian forces subsequently explained as explosive ordnance disposal operations. On March 28, UNOMIG monitors received reports near the boundary of "30 shots from an automatic gun," an "explosion of a grenade," and "four-five signal rockets," and 20-30 more shots from an automatic gun.

¶5. (C) One OSCE monitor told EmbOff on March 27 that he and his colleagues had perceived a general increase in tension over the past few weeks. In addition to the regular sound of shooting, he mentioned more frequent military movements on the South Ossetian side of the boundary as a key factor. Russian forces have explained many of these to international monitors, in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as associated with force rotations, but they nevertheless have apparently served to reinforce to local villagers the continuing presence of troops and military hardware. The OSCE monitor also said the planned April 9 protests were worrying people outside South Ossetia; they are concerned that Interior Ministry forces will be drawn away from the area to provide security during the protests, and malicious forces will then seek to exploit the relative lack of law enforcement to cross the boundary and cause trouble.

INCIDENT PREVENTION MECHANISM NEEDED

¶6. (SBU) In a briefing for the diplomatic corps on March 30, Deputy Foreign Minister Nalbandov and Internal Affairs Ministry spokesman Utiashvili provided details on the March 29 incident, placing the blame squarely on Russia as the occupying power and noted an MFA official statement about the incident that included language to this effect. They also expressed the concern that, after several weeks of no serious incidents, this one may be the first in a series of deliberate provocations designed to increase tension and obstruct any diplomatic efforts to improve the security

situation. They expressed their appreciation for public statements condemning the attack made by the EUMM and the OSCE. They also emphasized the useful role an incident prevention mechanism could play in this kind of situation -- indeed in preventing such a situation -- and noted that, of the participants in the Geneva process, the EU, OSCE, UN, United States and Georgia have all expressed a commitment to and taken steps to implement the mechanism, while Russia has not (ref C).

TEFFT